

VZCZCXYZ0000
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSJ #0881/01 3172207
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 122207Z NOV 08
FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0254
INFO RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHINGTON DC
RUEABND/DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMIN HQ WASHINGTON DC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS SAN JOSE 000881

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR INL JOHN LYLE AND WHA/CEN
JUSTICE FOR OIA, AFMLS, NDDS
TREASURY FOR FINCEN
DEA FOR OILS AND OFFICE OF DIVERSION CONTROL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SNAR](#) [CS](#)

SUBJECT: COSTA RICA INCSR REPORT 2008-2009 PART I, DRUGS AND
CHEMICAL CONTROL

REF: STATE 100970

11. (U) The text of Costa Rica's 2008-2009 INCSR Part I is below.
Costa Rica

1I. Summary

Costa Rica continues to be an increasingly important transit point for narcotics destined for the United States and Europe. Drug seizures for 2008, though not as high as 2007, remain high during the third year of the Arias administration. Local consumption of illicit narcotics, particularly crack, is growing at an alarming rate, along with the continued rise in drug-related violent crimes. In 2008 the Costa Rican Coast Guard (SNGC), with minimal INL investments in their communication and navigation ability, capitalized on their increased coordination capabilities to make several key interdictions with USG assistance. Costa Rica is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention.

II. Status of Country

Costa Rica's position on the isthmus linking Colombia with the United States, its long Atlantic and Pacific coastlines, and its jurisdiction over the Cocos Islands make it vulnerable to drug transshipment for South American cocaine and heroin destined primarily for the United States. The Government of Costa Rica (GOCR) closely and effectively cooperates with the USG in combating narcotics trafficked by land, sea, and air. Costa Rica also has a stringent governmental licensing process for the importation and distribution of controlled precursor chemicals.

III. Country Actions Against Drugs in 2008

Policy Initiatives. The Arias Administration named a new Minister of Public Security (MPS) in 2008. Under the new leadership, the MPS continued its effective cooperation with the USG to interdict narcotics. Of note, the Ministry has begun a National Plan to Combat Crack consumption in Costa Rica. In July and August, the MPS initiated the first stage of this plan with impressive interdiction results of 22,765 doses of crack, 11,871 marijuana plants, 218 kilos of cocaine, and 12,104 arrests. The Ministry, with USG assistance, has also begun a container inspection program at the Caribbean port of Limon. Additionally, the executive branch has sent organized crime bill legislation to the GOCR's national assembly for consideration. Finally, the SNGC, albeit with USG assistance, made some progress in addressing communications and navigations gaps. Accomplishments. Continued close bilateral cooperation and improved intra-GOCR coordination yielded impressive counternarcotics successes in 2008. Costa Rican authorities seized 16 metric tons (MT) of cocaine, of which 4 MT were seized on land or air and 12 MT seized in joint maritime interdiction operations with U.S. law enforcement. The GOCR also seized over 79,000 doses of crack cocaine, 33.1 kilograms (kg) of heroin, 4.5 tons of processed marijuana, and eradicated over 1.3 million marijuana plants. Additionally, Costa Rican authorities confiscated nearly \$2 million in U.S. and local currency. Though fewer than in 2007, the nearly 13,000 drug-related arrests made in 2008 are more than twice the amount made three years ago during the previous administration.

While no methamphetamine laboratories were detected in 2008, the GOCR has been active in trying to verify the identity of chemical precursor importers to ensure legitimacy. In a case carried over from 2007, the government cancelled a shipment of chemical precursors due to irregularities in the importing company and the lack of proper documentation and permits.

Law Enforcement Efforts. Costa Rican counternarcotics efforts are carried out by both the judicial branch (Judicial Investigative Police-OIJ) and the executive (Ministry of Public Security's Drug Control Police-PCD). Although the Arias Administration's plan to add 4000 new police officers to its force generated temporary increases in the numbers of cops on the street, the total number of police in the force at the end of 2008 stands at just above 10,000, similar to the level of 2007. Retention problems continue to plague the over-stretched force, with recruiting just keeping pace with retirement and attrition. The national legislature is expected to pass terrorist financing and reformed money laundering legislation by early 2009.

Corruption. As a matter of policy, no senior GOCR official or the GOCR itself, encourages or facilitates the illicit production or distribution of narcotic or psychotropic drugs or other controlled substances, or the laundering of proceeds from illegal drug transactions. A strict law against illicit enrichment was enacted in 2006 in response to unprecedented corruption scandals involving three ex-presidents. Although only one of the ex-presidents' cases (which date from 2004) has reached trial, Costa Rican authorities appear committed to combating public corruption. The GOCR conscientiously investigates allegations of official corruption or abuse.

Agreements and Treaties. Costa Rica is a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention, the 1961 Single Convention as amended by its 1972 Protocol, and the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances. Costa Rica is also a party to the UN Convention against Transnational

Organized Crime and its three protocols, the UN Convention against Corruption, the Inter-American Convention against Corruption, the Inter-American Convention on Extradition, the Inter-American Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters, the Inter-American Convention against Terrorism, and the Inter-American Convention against Trafficking in Illegal Firearms. The 1999 bilateral Maritime Counter Drug Cooperation Agreement, and its Ship-Rider program resulted in large seizures at sea during 2008. The 1991 United States-Costa Rican extradition treaty was again actively used in 2008. Costa Rica ratified a bilateral stolen vehicles treaty in 2002. Costa Rica and the United States are also parties to bilateral drug information and intelligence sharing agreements dating from 1975 and 1976. Costa Rica is a member of the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force and the Egmont Group, but must pass a terrorist financing law before March 2009 to remain in the Egmont Group. It is a member of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission of the Organization of American States (OAS/CICAD). Costa Rica signed the Caribbean regional maritime counter narcotics agreement in April 2003, and is currently taking the steps necessary to bring the agreement into force. In 2008, Costa Rica also played an active role in developing and implementing the regional security strategy developed by the Central American Security Commission.

Cultivation/Production. Costa Rica produces low quality marijuana but no other illicit drug crops or synthetic drugs. However, the GOCR estimates there are 400,000 marijuana users in the country.

Drug Flow/Transit. In 2008, smaller land-based shipments of 50-500 kg of cocaine continued, as did the number of larger shipments (500-1500 kg). Trafficking of narcotics by maritime routes remained steady with nearly 12 MT (slightly lower than last year's amount) of cocaine seized at sea during joint GOCR-USG operations. Traffickers continue to use Costa Rican-flagged fishing boats to smuggle multi-ton shipments of drugs and to provide fuel for go-fast boats, with continued emphasis on the Pacific routes. Traffickers have also continued the smuggling of drugs through the postal system, international courier services and via individual passengers ("mules") on international flights in/out of the country.

Domestic Programs/Demand Reduction. The Prevention Unit of the Instituto Costarricense sobre Drogas (ICD) oversees drug prevention efforts and educational programs throughout the country. The ICD and the Ministry of Education continued to distribute updated demand-reduction materials to all school children in 2008. In 2008, PCD continued to publicize its special phone-in number (176) in

their demand-reduction materials, to encourage citizens to report drug-related activity in their neighborhoods while remaining safely anonymous. The PCD considers the 176 phone-in program to be an excellent source of information that is analyzed and often leads to arrests.

IV. U.S. Policy Initiatives and Programs

The Merida Initiative. With the funds approved for the first year of the three-year Merida Initiative, Costa Rica will receive \$4.3 million in direct bilateral assistance to improve drug interdiction and law enforcement capabilities, with an emphasis on increased regional cooperation. More than half of the FY 2008 funds will go to modernizing or renovating the aging SNGC. A significant amount of money will go to improving police communications and movement capabilities, while border inspection equipment will be purchased to help detect drugs in vehicles and trailers. Costa Rica will also receive regional Merida assistance in areas such as firearms tracing, gang prevention, and educational and cultural exchanges. Bilateral Cooperation. While land-based interdiction, especially effective use of border checkpoints, remains important to U.S. strategy, U.S. assistance has focused resources on interdicting maritime-based narcotics shipments. The U.S. supported the SNGC's efforts to improve interdiction by providing technical assistance and equipment. The U.S. is also supporting reforms in police training.

The Road Ahead. In the year ahead, Costa Rica intends to attack maritime trafficking both through its own direct efforts and through continued collaboration with the USG. The projected increase in number and improved training of police should enable the GOCR to more successfully fight crime, including trafficking.

CIANCHETTE